



*A literature review on this topic revealed the following practices to be evidence based and effective. The intention of this review is to substantiate best practices in HVRPs with research findings in the professional workforce development literature, such as they exist and are relevant to the HVRP population. Where research is limited or not directly about veterans or homeless populations, inferences were made to inform HVRP practices.*



## WHAT WORKS?

Research at  
Your Fingertips

## EMPLOYMENT ASSESSMENTS: THE EVIDENCE

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Employment assessment or vocational assessment is ideally a holistic, client-based, ongoing process designed to incorporate information from multiple sources and approaches. As such, programs need access to multiple tools and models for employment assessment, and information about the strengths of these tools and their performance in practice settings. *What Works? Research at Your Fingertips* presents a review of research on a variety of assessment tools and strategies.

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## GOAL SETTING IN ASSESSING VOCATIONAL GOALS

Setting and achieving goals is fundamental to vocational practice, but this has been criticized for being a-theoretical, and the key components of replicable goal-setting interventions are not well-established (Scobbie et al. 2011). There are two schools of thought about setting goals that are relevant to employment assessment in Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Programs (HVRPs). One school holds that goals cannot be set until you know what the job seeker can and cannot do in terms of occupational performance. The absence of abilities limits the veteran's vocational choices and, conversely, the presence of certain abilities means they are good candidates for occupations requiring those talents.

Another school of thought on employment assessment came about in the late 1980s/early 1990s. Researchers at the Boston University's Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation turned the process around in favor of an assessment strategy that begins with the job seeker's preferences—what it is that they want to do in the world of work (Anthony & Lieberman, 1986). This school postulates that practitioners help job seekers set overall vocational goals, driven by the job seeker's interests, values,

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*Suggested Citation:*

National Veterans Technical Assistance Center. (2016). Best practices #3: Employment assessments: The evidence. From *What Works? Research at Your Fingertips* Best Practices series. Retrieved from <http://www.nvtac.org/best-practices/>.

needs, and preferences. Once a goal is established, the job seeker and the employment specialist consider what strengths the job seeker possesses that would be used to perform that occupational goal and what challenges need to be overcome or addressed, perhaps through job skill training.

Setting goals affects performance whether or not a person is disabled. A number of experimental studies have shown the positive effects of setting goals (Locke, Shaw, Saari, & Latham, 1981). “Goals affect performance by directing attention, mobilizing effort, increasing persistence and motivating strategy development” (Locke et al., 1981). In addition, the overall rehabilitation goal focuses subsequent assessment of the individual by limiting the skills and supports assessed to those that are relevant to satisfaction and success in that goal environment. Overall, goal setting is important because the hope of its achievement motivates the job seeker to participate in the vocational assessment process and anchors the direction of and commitment to needed behavior changes (Cohen, Farkas, Cohen, & Unger, 2007).

## Assessing and developing vocational readiness

Readiness refers to the amount of interest and willingness to engage in a process toward accomplishment of a goal. It has been linked to program participation and positive outcomes in services, including supportive housing and vocational rehabilitation (Cohen, Anthony, & Farkas, 1997). The [Rehabilitation Readiness Determination Profile \(RRDP\)](#) is an expressed needs interview designed to help staff and clients estimate how well prepared an individual may be to pursue a vocational or other overall goal (Smith et al., 1998). The RRDP has been adopted into a self-report form and has been used with homeless job seeking veterans. The Need for Change (NFC) self-rating scale, based on the concepts of rehabilitation readiness, is a brief, easily completed instrument designed to measure current employment-related readiness for change. The instrument is applicable to both employed and unemployed individuals, and it has demonstrated a relationship to job satisfaction, motivation, and employment experiences (Casper,

2003) and a high correlation to acceptance of supported employment referral (Casper & Carloni, 2006). In early testing, a vocational counseling adaptation of the University of Rhode Island Change Assessment (URICA-VC) has shown promising discriminant validity by producing differing outcomes for groups of clients likely to have different levels of vocational readiness, but it shows mixed predictive validity by demonstrating an association with job-related activities but not with job placement or program drop-out (Gervey, 2010).

Motivational interviewing has been identified as a strategy to enhance supported employment practice (Secker & Margrove, 2014) and vocational rehabilitation (Wagner & McMahon 2004; Manthey, Jackson, & Evans-Brown, 2011). It is well-aligned with the goals of readiness assessment in that overall goals are established and serve as a destination and source of commitment to change unhelpful behaviors or to develop new skills. Research on the incorporation of motivational interviewing into supported employment and vocational assessment is in its infancy, but one early study does suggest that employment specialists are readily able to adopt motivational interviewing techniques, grow more comfortable with their use over time, and believe motivational interviewing has a positive impact on client outcomes (Secker & Margrove, 2014).

## Aligning situational assessment with supported employment values

Situational assessment or community-based assessment has a long-standing history in vocational rehabilitation, and a variety of situational assessment tools exist. Situational assessment is assessment that uses actual employment and community settings in which the job seeker’s skill strengths and weaknesses are determined. Assessments in simulated work environments, and in facility-based programs such as sheltered workshops, do not contain the various nuances and variables of actual work environments, which many felt were necessary to make an educated choice concerning employment options. Some have argued, however, that many standard uses of situational assessment are at odds with the principles of supported employment—particularly the principles of

zero exclusion and job search based on client choice—and that such assessments are not oriented to the important processes of exploring and developing client motivation to work (McGuire, Bond, Evans, Lysaker & Kim, 2007; Bond and Friedmeyer, 1987). However, others have suggested that situational assessments can play an important role in supported employment, particularly in helping employment specialists better determine the types of support needed to improve clients' retention of their chosen positions (Peer & Tenhula, 2010). Increasingly, employment specialists conduct situational assessments “in vivo,” meaning they assess skills in the setting in which they are actually needed.

HVRPs considering incorporating situational assessment into their vocational assessment practices will find a variety of existing tools for this purpose, each with unique strengths and challenges in terms of ease of use in practice, established validity and reliability, and domains assessed. Peer and Tenhula (2010) offer a side-by-side comparison of these tools and their characteristics. It is important to note, however, that instrument performance may not be consistent across projects. For example, the Work Behavior Inventory (WBI; Bryson et al., 1997), a tool designed to guide situation assessment in employment programs serving adults with psychiatric disabilities, has been cited as “well validated” based on initial testing completed in sheltered job placements (Peer & Tenhula, 2010), yet a community-based study found that WBI scores were only predictive of work outcomes within the subsample of participants who were able to secure paid employment (McGuire, Bond, Evans, Lysaker, & Kim, 2007). In selecting a measure, programs may wish to consider the settings in which these tools were developed and tested, and the comparability of those settings to their own.

## Identifying and leveraging existing coping skills

Comprehensive assessment includes identification of support needs and of existing client strengths. Both of these tasks relate to evaluation of clients' established strategies for managing potential barriers to employment. The Illness Self-Management assessment

for Psychiatric Vocational Rehabilitation (ISM-PVR) is a useful add-on to existing vocational assessment that identifies barriers related to a person's psychiatric condition, and strategies that the person already employs to manage those barriers. Preliminary testing of this tool suggests that it presents little burden to vocational rehabilitation clients with psychiatric disabilities and that it is useful in generating discussion and planning related to on-the-job management of psychiatric symptoms and related experiences (Michon, van Weeghel, Kroon & Schene, 2011).

## Assessing fit of an identified or obtained position

Vocational assessment is not a one-time process, nor is it a process that ends once the client's first job has been identified. Assessing client interests and preferences is a key component of vocational assessment and, like the assessment process overall, can be an ongoing one. The Job Match Survey (Huff, 2005) is designed to assess the client-job fit of positions that have been obtained. The instrument measures the constructs of interest/enjoyment, self-efficacy, and meaningfulness. The survey may be a predictor of job retention, as one recent study found a significant, positive relationship between job tenure and both overall Job Match Survey scores and interest/enjoyment sub-scale scores (Kukla & Bond, 2012).

## Advancing understanding of customized employment discovery and its outcomes

Customized employment (CE) is an employment model characterized by voluntary negotiations between job seekers and potential employers that result in the development of positions that meet employer needs while closely matching job-seeker skills and work preferences. The process begins with a holistic assessment phase often referred to as “discovery.”

Although a variety of guidelines and models exist for conducting discovery, one recent study advanced a consensus-based competency model of the process through a customized employment expert rating. This project yielded a set of 11 tasks rated as moderately, very, or extremely important by the panel of expert raters (Harvey, Szoc, Dela Rosa, Pohl, & Jenkins,

2013). Shown in order of likely implementation below, these tasks highlight the centrality of gathering information from diverse sources to develop a holistic, integrated assessment.

1. Explain the CE process to the job seeker and family.
2. Anticipate, discuss, and set up financial supports to implement and maintain the CE process.
3. Complete forms/paperwork necessary to intake the job seeker.
4. Identify a profile template for recording job seeker information.
5. Identify and involve a support team.
6. Begin the discovery process with the job seeker.
7. Observe the job seeker performing activities in a variety of settings.
8. Participate with the job seeker in a novel or unfamiliar activity.
9. Interview people who know the job seeker well.
10. Review job seeker's files and other records to learn about the job seeker.
11. Integrate the information gathered and complete the personal profile. (Harvey et al., 2013, p. 83)

The discovery process may play a key role not only in the outcomes of traditional CE, but also in modified versions of the model designed to support entrepreneurs in customizing self-employment plans and implementation. One recent study of entrepreneurs with disabilities receiving customized self-employment services found an association between engagement in the discovery process and a successful business launch (Heath, Ward, & Reed, 2013).

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